

Couples opting for small families

LARGE families are quite an oddity these days what with the rising cost of living and the conscious effort to have a better quality of life. Today, women are increasingly under pressure to decide whether to be homemakers or working mothers. In the first of a three-part series, **SHAILA KOSHY** looks at the population trend, its effects on growth and family planning.



GOD'S GIFT ... Pak Sastro, Asiah and some of his 50 grandchildren look at family portrait

Large family's bitter sweet life

By FOONG THIM LENG

MAY you be blessed with many children and grandchildren to fill your hall. That's a traditional greeting to Chinese couples during wedding ceremonies.

Most couples today will not treat the statement seriously as raising a large number of children is considered a bothersome affair among average parents of any race.

But for Pak Raden Ahmad Sudarmo Raden Keromo Wijaya, 75, having a large number of children is a "bitter sweet affair."

He has 20 children and 50 grandchildren and he is happy.

Pak Sastro, as he is popularly known, has

been married to Puan Asiah Abdallah for 43 years and lives with 10 of his children in Kampung Temiang, Ipoh.

"My children are God's gift. Bringing them up has not been easy but we are one large happy family," he said.

His formula for success includes self-confidence, determination, a good understanding between husband and wife and family commitment.

Pak Sastro was the son of a village headman in Indonesia. He ran away from school at an early age and joined the revolutionary movement against the Dutch rule.

He travelled widely in Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand before settling in Perak where he worked as a court atten-

dant at the palace.

While working at the istana he met and married Asiah who was an adopted daughter of a consort of the then Raja Di-Milir.

Life became difficult when the children arrived. He was only earning a small salary and Asiah supplemented the family income by planting tapioca, sugar cane, bananas and vegetables and sewing clothes for neighbours.

Twelve of the children were delivered at home by the bidan and the rest at the hospital.

Their children never went to the movies and on Hari Raya Puasa they would get one or two new dresses sewed by Asiah.

Asiah used to cook a gantang of rice, four ka-

tis of fish and four katlis of vegetables each day.

Two of his sons are working in the fire brigade, one in the air force, one works as an artist while the rest are working as clerks, petty traders and employees of supermarkets.

A son and a daughter are still attending school.

But for Puan Halimah Raden, 36, having four children is enough.

Her husband is a petty trader in Kuala Lumpur while she makes bags and boxes to supplement the family income.

She said times had changed and that there were many undesirable influences to worry about. She also said cost of education was another deterring factor.